CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1.   A network-based, computer-implemented method of fulfilling multi-modal freight shipment involving at least two transportation modes between a first location and a second location, comprising:

receiving a derivative purchase request for capacity between said first location and said second location, said derivative purchase request having contract requirements that specify at least a shipment volume and a performance time;

ascertaining from a database of available derivative contracts a plurality of potentially suitable derivative contracts that satisfy said contract requirements; and

selecting a subset of said plurality of potentially suitable derivative contracts to satisfy said derivative purchase request, said subset including at least a first derivative contract for a first mode of said two transportation modes and a second derivative contract for a second mode of said two transportation modes.

2.   The method of claim 1 wherein said plurality of derivative contracts represent all derivative contracts in said database that satisfy said contract requirements.

3.   The method of claim 1 wherein said subset is selected using a fair and neutral trading rule.

4.   The method of claim 1 further comprising:

receiving data pertaining to capacity releases from shippers, each of said capacity releases specifying a shipment volume and an origination point and a destination point, each of said capacity releases further specifying performance details including one of a departure time, a time en-route, and an arrival time;

bundling selected ones of said capacity releases into said available derivative contracts, wherein at least one of said available derivative contracts comprises a plurality of said capacity releases.

5.   The method of claim 4 wherein said bundling includes grouping capacity releases that involve geographically proximal origination and destination points.

6.   The method of claim 5 wherein said bundling further includes grouping capacity releases that fall within a predefined time window.

7.   The method of claim 4 wherein said bundling includes grouping capacity releases that fall within a predefined time window.

8.   The method of claim 4 further comprising:

providing an adjustment market facility for allowing a purchaser of said capacity between said first location and said second location pursuant to said subset of said plurality of potentially suitable derivative contracts to trade a specific component of said subset of said plurality of potentially suitable derivative contracts with other participants of the freight industry.

9.   The method of claim 1 further comprising:

receiving shipment forecasts pertaining to potential future shipments and self-assessed qualitative ratings associated with said shipment forecasts;

aggregating said shipment forecasts and qualitative ratings into aggregated shipment forecasts and aggregated qualitative ratings; and

furnishing said aggregated shipment forecasts and said aggregated qualitative ratings to a trader to enable said trader to evaluate a volume of derivative contracts to be purchased, said trader representing one of a market maker, a forwarder, and a carrier.

10.   The method of claim 9 wherein a self-assessed qualitative rating of said self-assessed qualitative ratings involves a shipper's self-assessment of at least four of a set of criteria that includes demand, manufacturing readiness, manufacturing location, capacity, product, lane, and lane stability.

11.   The method of claim 9 wherein a self-assessed qualitative rating of said self-assessed qualitative ratings involves a shipper's self-assessment of a set of criteria that includes demand, manufacturing readiness, manufacturing location, capacity, product, lane, and lane stability.

12.   The method of claim 9 further comprising:

computing quantitative ratings pertaining to said shipment forecasts, said quantitative ratings being based at least on historical data pertaining to past shipment forecasts and past actual shipment volume;

aggregating said quantitative ratings into aggregated quantitative ratings; and

furnishing said aggregated quantitative ratings to said trader.

13.   The method of claim 1 wherein said first mode represents one of an air transportation mode, a sea transportation mode, a rail transportation mode, and a truck transportation mode, said second mode represent a different one of said air transportation mode, said sea transportation mode, said rail transportation mode, and said truck transportation mode.

14.   The method of claim 1 further comprising providing a derivative contract trading facility to enable market makers to electronically trade said first derivative contract and said second derivative contract prior to expiration.

15.   The method of claim 1 further comprising providing data pertaining to said first derivative contract and said second derivative contract to an electronic booking system upon performance time of said first derivative contract to book capacity for shipment using said first mode and said second mode respectively.

16.   The method of claim 1 further comprising

computing freight indices based on historical shipment volume between said first location and said second location; and

furnishing said aggregated shipment forecasts and said aggregated qualitative ratings to a trader, said trader representing one of a market maker, a forwarder, and a carrier.

17.   The method of claim 1 wherein said derivative purchase request represents futures purchase request.

18.   The method of claim 1 wherein said derivative purchase request represents option purchase request.